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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the background of various accountability systems, discusses policy issues related to the use of educational accountability information, and offers a history of the school-accountability law in Nevada. The paper concludes that because policymakers continue to express concerns about uniform measurements and comparability, it is likely that nationally norm-referenced tests will continue to be used in accountability systems. The demand for quality information will continue and the level of sophistication and policymakers' reliance on accountability systems will increase. States will continue to use achievement scores as a component of any accountability program. The need for reliable analyses of the information provided by such systems will become increasingly important. Appendices contain information on states' use of report cards, two approaches to student-assessment policy, Nevada school districts' use of standardized tests during 1994-95, achievement data for Nevada school districts and counties (1992-93), an analysis of the Nevada school-accountability system, and the Nevada deputy attorney general's opinion of Senate Bill 511--the School Accountability Law. (Contains 18 references.) (LMI)

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BACKGROUND PAPER 95-14

PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

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BACKGROUND PAPER 95-14

PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction 1

Background 2

- Indicator Systems 2
- Performance Indicators--Issues 3
- Linking Accountability to Consequences 4
- Role of Achievement Tests 6
- Norm Referenced and Criterion Referenced Tests 7

Accountability and Policy Decisions 8

- Accountability for Policymakers 8
- Policy Functions 10
- State Experiences with Accountability Reporting 11
- Cautions About Using Accountability Data 12
- Policy Issues 13

History of the School Accountability Law in Nevada 15

- Nevada Proficiency Examination 16
- Program of Accountability 17
- Senate Bill 511 (1993 Session) 18
- Role of the State Department of Education 19

Conclusion 20

Selected References 21

Appendices 23

PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

INTRODUCTION

One old business adage states that you cannot manage the things that you cannot measure. According to a recent study by the State Department of Education, Nevada policymakers and educators at all levels feel hampered by the fact that their decisions are often made without the benefit of relevant data.[1]

Although major education reform measures have been adopted by the state within the last decade--the Nevada Proficiency Exam Program, class-size reduction, and site-based management--it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives due to the lack of a comprehensive statewide database. At the local level, school district boards of trustees, superintendents, and even principals and teachers often make decisions concerning specific programs without data (or with possibly inaccurate data) concerning their effectiveness. In addition, the movement toward greater parental choice has fueled the need to provide school-by-school information regarding achievement scores, teacher experience, financing, and safety matters.

Some analysts have observed an erosion of public faith in schools, trust in educators, and the perceived ability to effectively control safety in schools. This distrust coincided with the rising role of Federal and State Governments in the regulation of public schools.[2] Since more and more policy decisions about education are being made at the state level, there is a greater need for meaningful, uniform data at that level which would allow for comparisons among the school districts.

As policymakers and the public have become more concerned with the quality of American public education, there has been an increased emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of the education system. During the mid 1980s and early 1990s, many states turned to system indicators--collections of statistics that reflect how well the public education systems are working. Over 48 states now require school districts to submit information that is then published in a system performance report. Sixteen states (including Nevada) have comprehensive systems that report the information at the school level (see appendix A).

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[1] *Smart Plan: Statewide Management of Automated Record Transfer*, State Department of Education, 1994.

[2] Brown, Patricia R. "Accountability in Public Education." *Policy Briefs* No. 14, Far West Laboratory, 1990.

BACKGROUND

The word "accountability" suggests four fundamental questions--who is accountable; what are they accountable for; what are the indicators for accountability; and to whom are they accountable? States with educational accountability systems address these questions (or fail to address them) in a number of ways and to varying degrees.

As states have developed greater technical capacity for aggregating and comparing data, there has been a national trend toward greater state-level involvement with accountability. One of the fundamental dilemmas facing the states is the need to develop accountability systems that serve both state-level and district-level policymakers.[3]

The chart in Appendix A ("Accountability - Public Reporting of School Performance [Report Cards]"), provides an overview of the level of detail contained within state-level accountability reporting programs. Thirteen states have a basic level of reporting, listing district level data for a few indicators such as dropout rates and achievement scores. Nineteen states have a more inclusive program, listing additional data including pupil-teacher ratios and educational attainment of classroom teachers. Sixteen states use a comprehensive program, reporting a variety of data at the school level. Such systems allow for comparisons from school to school and from district to district.

Traditionally, state accountability regulations have focused largely upon the "inputs" to the education process, specifying such factors as class size, staff credentials, and program offerings. In the mid-1970s states began to specify additional outcome standards for schools through the use of minimum competency testing programs. These programs were typically focused on basic skills, and frequently made individual students the target of accountability efforts, by denying promotion or graduation opportunities to students who failed the test. More recently, states also have begun to incorporate the findings of effective schools research into their regulatory systems, establishing standards for such education practices as staff development, goal setting, teacher evaluation, principal leadership, and so on. In addition to regulating inputs and inspecting results, many states have begun to directly regulate the process components --educational practice and governance.

Indicator Systems

During the late 1980s and the 1990s, the development of accountability systems was based upon system indicators--collections of statistics that reflect how well the public education system is working. By 1994, 48 states required school districts to submit

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[3] Gregg, Soleil. "Accountability: Student Performance Is the Bottom Line." *Policy Briefs*. Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1992: pp. 1-2.

information that appears in a system performance report. The following chart lists some of the input, output, and process indicators that have been used for such reports.

Input	Process	Output
Fiscal Resources	School Decision Making	Achievement Scores
Student Background	Teaching Process	Participation Levels
Teacher Quality	Instructional Quality	Attitudes
Curriculum Guidelines	Program Management	Employability

Source: Far West Laboratories (1990), and others.

From the policymaker's perspective, the essential purpose of education indicator systems is to assess direction, mission, and strategy. For state policymakers, it means reviewing the policy goals for the state's education system and determining whether those goals are being met. Ideally, such systems are expected to present information about what is being accomplished within a framework of what should be accomplished. If used in this manner, the system will help establish policy direction. Indicator systems can be applied to educational systems in three basic forms:

- The basic level provides information on the effectiveness of the system to interested parties (Nevada's current system);
- The next level adds a component to determine whether policies and programs are meeting predetermined goals and objectives; and
- The third level has the capacity to suggest areas for further study and provides research evidence upon which to base specific policy and program changes.

Performance Indicators--Issues

The debate continues concerning the best indicators for school performance. A recent study on school-level accountability report cards suggests there is a gap between the information parents want to receive and what data school administrators think they should have.[4] High on most parents' lists is school safety and facility concerns. Parents and policymakers across the country are expressing growing concern about the increase in youth violence. Parents have a fundamental interest in school safety matters and are particularly interested about incidents at their child's school. Other

[4] Viadero, Debra. "Administrators Found Out of Tune with Parents on School Report Cards." *Education Week* (August 3, 1994): p. 11.

interests expressed by Nevada parent groups have included the age and availability of instructional materials, transiency rates, and special education matters.[5]

Other unresolved issues about indicators include:

- Accommodating the high correlation between test scores and pupils' socioeconomic background;
- Assessing implications for finance equalization if wealthy districts display higher achievement levels; and
- Determining whether a particular reform strategy, such as site-based management (for example), is a significant enough incentive to change local educators' behavior.[6]

Linking Accountability to Consequences

Most of the legislation and research describing system indicators refer to them as accountability measures. However, such systems typically do not define the specific responsibilities for all the key players in the public education system. In the past, policymakers often did not address the critical question of how such system indicators are to be used.[7] In recent years, the trend among policymakers has been away from a system that presents reports about the educational system, and toward linking assessment to other policies with more tangible consequences--a transition from data being used as persuasion to using the information for regulatory purposes.[8] The state of Kentucky, for example, uses its accountability to identify schools needing assistance. If improvements are not documented within a reasonable period, provisions exist for the state to take over the school.

Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Vermont also are attempting to tie accountability measures to various rewards and sanctions. In 1993, the Missouri legislature enacted one of the more ambitious plans. Besides equalizing funding among districts, the legislation will set new state standards and methods of assessment; provide money to prepare teachers and schools to implement the standards; and establish strong incentives and penalties for schools that do and do not meet them.

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[5] *Study of Public Elementary and Secondary Education*. Legislative Counsel Bureau Bulletin No. 95-3, December 1994: pp. 77-78.

[6] Kirst, Michael W. *Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers*. United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990: p. 20.

[7] Brown, Patricia R. "Accountability in Public Education." *Policy Brief No. 14*, Far West Laboratory (1990): 1.

[8] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education*: p. 408.

Specifically, if a Missouri school is found not to be meeting the statewide standards, it will be declared "academically deficient." The state will appoint an audit team to confirm the school's deficiencies. If the school is determined to be deficient, the state board of education has 560 days to convene a management team to determine what the school must do to improve. Recommendations could include everything from recalling school board members to suspending long-term contracts for principals or teachers or to allocating more resources. The school has 2 years to improve. If it is still deemed deficient after 2 years, the district will be forced to implement the management team's recommendations.

As for the incentive portion of Missouri's law, part of the state funding for each school will be based on the percentage of students who actually attend class. Furthermore, schools performing at the highest level in all academic areas will be exempt from most state regulations and will remain exempt as long as performance stays high.

No deadline has been set for the full implementation of the program. Educators say that moving to a standard-based system requires considerable time to train staff and devise new assessment measures that will reflect successful strategies. For instance, if the dropout rate improves, test scores could go down.

What drives an accountability system is the vision of how it will be used. If policymakers view accountability as another external reporting requirement, they will favor a system that responds to short-term reporting specifications. If a system is envisioned for long-term internal use, a program needs to be developed that is responsive to internal school needs and also addresses the informational needs of multiple constituencies.[9]

Educator Lorraine McDonnell notes that policy uses of educational assessments can be plotted on a continuum. At one end are purely informational uses such as describing the overall status of the educational system and aiding in instructional decisions about individual students. At the other end are regulatory uses such as using assessments to hold schools accountable for student performance, or certifying individual student mastery. In between are "persuasive" uses, such as establishing curricular coherence, motivating students to perform better, and acting as a force to change instructional content.[10] Both have the same objective of improved student achievement, but use different policy tools to motivate action (see Appendix B, titled "Two Approaches to Student Assessment Policy").

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[9] Mills, Stephen R. and Nanette E. Koelsch. *Accountability Programs and Projects in the Western Region*. Far West Laboratories, 1993: p. 33.

[10] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education* (August 1994): p. 395.

Role of Achievement Tests

The accountability movement's basic goal is to make schools responsible for pupil attainment of certain minimum or essential skills. Achievement testing was to be the means of assessing the discharge of that responsibility. When the threat of loss of prestige, control, or resources is attached to the results of a mandated test, that test is referred to as "high stakes."[11]

In a recent national survey of state and local test directors, a clear division emerged in the perceived purposes of achievement tests. At the school district level, tests are generally perceived to be for information gained about students, schools, or curriculum. At the state level, district or state accountability was a "vivid purpose for testing * * *."[12] States reported a clear purpose in making test results public to encourage voters or school boards to instigate needed system-wide changes.

However, the same survey noted that the purpose given for tests was principally diagnosis and evaluation--the least popular uses of statewide tests involved state-level planning, tracking or resource allocation, or the ability grouping of individual students. Test directors also expressed concern about the possible uses of test results to compare districts or states that are not alike, as if they were, or to make unwarranted inferences about students.[13] Others caution that undue emphasis upon the results of achievement tests can lead to breaches in test security, and inappropriate teaching practices.[14]

Those opposed to the use of assessment data for accountability argue that the effects produced by top-down assessment policies have not been what policymakers always expected nor have they been beneficial to students. Many testing experts assert that when assessments are used to advance policy objectives, particularly when rewards and sanctions are involved, negative consequences can result. These problems include a widening of the gap in educational opportunities available to different students; a narrowing of the curriculum and skills being taught; a centralization of decision-making; and the de-professionalization of teachers.[15]

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[11] Smith, Mary Lee. *The Role of High-Stakes Testing in School Reform.* National Education Association, 1993: pp 8-9.

[12] *Student Testing: Current Extent and Expenditures, With Cost Estimates for a National Examination.* United States General Accounting Office, 1993: p. 25.

[13] *Student Testing: Current Extent and Expenditures, With Cost Estimates for a National Examination.* United States General Accounting Office, 1993: p. 53.

[14] Phillips, S.E. *Legal Implications of High Stakes Assessment: What States Should Know.* North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1993: pp. 24-25.

[15] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education*: pp. 394-95.

Although test experts and a number of groups and individuals criticize the use of achievement tests in high-stakes accountability programs, many agree that such tests can provide a broad picture of pupil learning or school effectiveness.[16] One recent study advises those concerned about the policy uses of assessment data to stress its role in the deliberative process that is part of government:

> Deliberation assumes persuasion, but it also assumes discussion informed by sound data.[17]

Norm Referenced and Criterion Referenced Tests

The two basic types of tests used in accountability programs are norm-referenced tests and performance-based tests. Briefly stated, norm-referenced tests measure the skill level of an individual along a continuum. The average skill level of a grade or other grouping also can be computed. The well-known bell-curve is an example of how persons score along this scale, with a few showing minimal skills, a few demonstrating advanced understanding, and the great majority falling within a bulge on either side of the middle.

On the other hand, a performance or criterion-referenced test, in its purest form, measures whether the individual (or group) demonstrate a specific level of skill--either they meet the performance standard or they do not meet it. An example of this type of test would be the Nevada Proficiency Examination. The criteria that is measured and reported is whether or not the student passed the test. The extent of any comparative data between schools and districts would be a report of the percentage of students who passed the test. Comparisons with other states would not be possible, at least for this test, because other states do not administer the Nevada Proficiency Examination.

In contrast, a norm-referenced test, such as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), reports a numerical score for individuals and for groups (if the average is used). Comparisons can be made with regard to the level of achievement, and comparisons are possible among school districts with other states which use the CTBS.

Although statewide criterion-referenced tests would allow for some comparisons among districts within a state, similar comparisons with other states would not be possible. Both types of tests are useful. In general, norm-referenced tests are more useful to public policymakers since they more easily allow comparisons with other states; performance-based tests are more useful to teachers.

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[16] Smith, Mary Lee. *The Role of High-Stakes Testing in School Reform*. Nevada Education Association, 1993.

[17] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education*: p. 415.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLICY DECISIONS

There are a number of issues involved in using educational accountability information to determine public policy. The points of view for both policymakers and testing experts often are in conflict. An examination of the policymaker's viewpoint and the possible functions of accountability reveals a number of issues that states have addressed or will address when considering accountability matters.

Accountability for Policymakers

In a recent study, state and national policymakers were asked to identify problems that assessment policy could address. Assessments were viewed as serving the following purposes:

- Providing information about the status of the educational system;
- Aiding in instructional decisions about individual students;
- Bringing greater curricular coherence to the system;
- Motivating students to perform better and parents to demand higher performance;
- Acting as a lever to change instruction content and strategies;
- Holding schools and educators accountable for student performance; and
- Certifying individual students as having attained specified levels of achievement or mastery.[18]

When limited to just the state-level policymakers, the responses indicated that accountability was a major purpose of assessment.[19] The study concluded that policymakers have multiple expectations for assessment policy to change the behavior of administrators, students, teachers, and, in some cases, employers, parents and even the general public. Two philosophies prevail among policymakers concerning how change is to occur.

The first group sees change as a direct process, with assessment prompting specific alterations in curriculum and instruction that, in turn, will improve student achievement. The expectation is that teachers will be motivated to alter their practices based upon

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[18] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 5.

[19] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 6.

this data, because they will accept that such changes will improve teaching and learning. Some proponents of this philosophy believe, however, that rewards and sanctions will be needed to effect change.[20]

The second group of policymakers see the change process as more complex and indirect. While assessment data is expected to provide information for school improvement, the uses of the information are perceived differently. The data could be used by local districts to implement curricular reform, while others might use the same data to reward and punish schools that do not change the curriculum. Still others might report test results and expect individual schools to make appropriate changes with little or no central direction.[21]

However, many question whether a single assessment system can serve multiple purposes. Over the past decade, testing experts have argued that high-stakes tests cannot also be used to provide information about the status of an education system or to shape coherent curriculum. Most testing experts have devoted considerable energy to documenting and studying the negative consequences of such testing on students and schools. There is, however, general agreement among most policymakers and test experts that the level of detail needed for instructional decisions concerning individual students differs from what is needed to report on the status of an education system or to make policy decisions at the district or state level. Nevertheless, as noted by Lorraine McDonnell in her survey report:

> * * * one criterion policymakers are likely to use in judging the feasibility of different assessment strategies is the extent to which multiple expectations can be met by the same system.[22]

It is likely that policymakers will continue to see assessments as exerting a powerful influence over school practices. At the same time, concerns about costs and about excessive testing will tend to continue the practice of using the same assessments for multiple purposes--some of which may have negative consequences for students, teachers, and schools. However, as long as testing experts are "unable or unwilling to design assessments that can explicitly serve multiple purposes or be linked to other high-stakes policies, the impasse will continue."[23]

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[20] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: pp. 10-11.

[21] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 11.

[22] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: pp. 11-12.

[23] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 36.

McDonnell's survey of policymakers concludes that, while policymakers and testing experts will continue to disagree about the appropriate policy uses of student assessments, the groups need to be aware of each other's values and interest. All parties must recognize that, at best, assessments are imprecise tools with limitations to their ability to support generalizations and that questions remain about the appropriate uses for this information. She notes that testing experts need to be aware that policymakers will adopt some form of assessment to evaluate policy decisions, even while recognizing that the assessment system will contain flaws. The expectation is that these assessment systems will continue to operate while they are simultaneously fine-tuned.[24]

Policy Functions

Education accountability systems serve three major policy functions at the state level --determining cost-benefit questions; maintaining quality control; and building support for school reform. First, nationwide efforts to restructure schools have significant associated costs. Policymakers and the public are reluctant to commit additional funding to education without a mechanism in place to demonstrate improvements in student achievement.

Second, accountability systems help maintain educational quality as restructuring efforts, the charter schools movement, and site-based management efforts shift the balance of power away from states to local control groups. If states are no longer able to monitor specific instructional processes, the ability to monitor student performance outcomes emerges as the method used by policymakers to maintain a sense of quality control for the system as a whole.

The third function for accountability is its use as a political tool for building support for school reform efforts. Policymakers are more inclined to approve reform measures when pilot program indicators reflect gains in student achievement. Likewise, the public is more apt to support tax and bond measures with proof that the extra spending will make a difference.[25]

In this respect, accountability systems are political rather than technical in nature, and this difference may account for the lack of reconciliation between test experts and policymakers regarding the use of assessment data for accountability purposes.[26]

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[24] McDonnell, Lorraine M. *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment.* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 37.

[25] Gregg, Soleil. "Accountability: Student Performance Is the Bottom Line." *Policy Briefs.* Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1992: p. 1.

[26] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education*: p. 396.

Accountability as a political model--instead of a technical model--shifts the debate to a policy level.

Since it is rare for all parties to agree about a policy direction for public education, the political model for accountability has the potential to assist the process, since it assumes there is a lack of consensus and that the public interest may be difficult to define. Political accountability then establishes a set of procedural values designed to ensure a fair and open process to determine which goals should prevail Political accountability also assumes that the electorate holds politicians accountable for educational performance; politicians, in turn, hold administrators and teachers accountable. Each group is dependent on the other.[27]

State Experiences with Accountability Reporting

Various states have used accountability reporting for a number of years. In 1992, the Southern Regional Education Board, a coalition of southern states, issued a report concerning lessons learned about school accountability reports. The report concluded that accountability reporting is part of an overall educational improvement effort. There is little benefit to describing outcomes without also designing ways to use the results.

Other observations from the report include:

- Individual school reports can serve two primary purposes: school improvement **and** school accountability.

- There needs to be broad concensus on what is reported, and plans need to be made to gather necessary data. At present, what is reported too often is simply what is available.

- States must develop consensus on a standard of acceptable performance. Public awareness is essential as states move to "higher standards."

- Ownership and cooperation are vital to success. Educators, parents, businesses, and the community should be involved in school improvement and accountability efforts.

- A core of comparable data is needed, as well as unique information that reflects the character of each school.

- School reports should include multiple years of data on student performance to show progress over time.

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[27] McDonnell, Lorraine M. "Assessment Policy as Persuasion and Regulation." *American Journal of Education*: p. 410.

- Collecting and verifying individual school data is critical because issues and problems are magnified at the school level.

- Reports should show results for different groups within the school, including information by race/ethnicity and gender.

- School reports should be "customer friendly" — easily understood by parents, community members, and government and school leaders.

- Interpretation of the data in reports is important. Educators, parents, and other community members need clearly established ways to react to and use reports.

- When looking at progress in student achievement, there must be a shift in perspective — from solving a single, isolated problem to viewing improvement as a process that never ends.

- The real litmus test is action in every school — school reporting should result in continuous improvement based on student performance.

Maintaining public support and assuring educational accountability will become increasingly crucial as states shift decision making responsibilities to local schools. "Report cards" can be important tools in measuring progress toward goals and in the public's understanding of how students are performing.[28]

Cautions About Using Accountability Data

Linking assessment for policy purposes to individual student's performance poses some philosophical problems. Most cognitive scientists advocate the form of learning in which learning is desired and controlled by the learner. An individual's construction of new knowledge depends strongly upon the person's sense of being in charge of the learning. Reform mandated through an assessment system creates a situation (teaching to the test) which is in direct opposition to this principle.[29]

Those opposed to the use of assessments to drive policy argue that statewide policies are often reinterpreted at the local level. If teachers are held accountable for test scores, it is argued, they will begin to teach to the test, focusing on curriculum that the test measures, and drilling students in test-taking methods which replicate the way the test is administered.

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[28] Gaines, Gail F. and Lynn M. Cornett. *School Accountability Reports: Lessons Learned in SREB States.* Southern Regional Education Board, 1992: p. 18.

[29] Noble, Audrey J. *Old and New Beliefs About Measurement-Driven Reform: "The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same."* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 19.

For example, the Nevada Proficiency Exam Program requires 4th and 8th grade tests in reading, mathematics, and writing using the CTBS. Should teachers be held strictly accountable for test scores, they may emphasize reading, writing skills, and math instruction--to the detriment of science, history, and other subjects. Since CTBS utilizes multiple choice questions, teachers might lean toward using that type of test for all subjects, thereby improving test-taking skills for that form of assessment. Other forms of instruction and assessment using problem-solving techniques and measuring general understanding might then suffer.[30]

Some educators caution that the use of a statewide accountability system may stifle efforts to reform and "decentralize" the educational system by directing too much attention to maintaining or improving achievement scores.[31]

Policy Issues

The literature concerning school accountability programs is filled with cautions and discussions concerning the policy questions associated with such systems. Key issues include the following:

- Policymakers need to determine the level of detail required for accountability. Data systems and performance indicators have improved over the years; there is now a vast array of data that may be useful for accountability purposes. The most difficult problem involves developing and funding the database to provide an adequate picture of the entire educational system. Simple indicators are typically inexpensive to collect and report, but may present only a narrow picture of the system--more complex indicators are usually more expensive and often more difficult to standardize and compare across school systems.[32]

- Maintaining effective accountability programs requires a long-term commitment by policymakers. Political support from key constituencies is necessary to continue long-term programs such as school accountability.

- Many states are experimenting with relaxing regulatory control--offering some schools less regulation if performance indicators demonstrate improved outcomes. Charter school programs are an example of this approach. States implementing site-based management programs are likewise making use of performance

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[30] Noble, Audrey J. *Old and New Beliefs About Measurement-Driven Reform: "The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same."* National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1994: p. 6.

[31] Kirst, Michael W. *Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers.* United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990: p. 30.

[32] Kirst, Michael W. *Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers.* United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990: p. 28.

indicators to monitor the quality of school programs. Other potential school choice programs, such as open enrollment programs and voucher systems, can also make use of accountability measures to monitor achievement levels.

- According to a recent report by the Educational Testing Service, one feature of testing that should be examined by policymakers involves the "test all students" approach used by 41 state accountability systems. Only one state uses a sampling system--three states have a mixed system in place. The report notes that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has been operating on a sampling basis for over 20 years. The sampling approach has been used at the state level, and could be applied at the district level as well. The authors of the report note that sampling can serve accountability needs without intruding so much on instructional time. Testing every student in a class could then be reserved for serving instructional purposes.[33] However, Nevada's present accountability system provides for school-level accountability reports rather than the district-level reports previously required. An approach using sampling would be more difficult to implement at the school level.

- States with indicator systems may need to review what types of rewards or sanctions exist to ensure use of available information for performance assessment, improvement planning, and so on.[34]

- States should examine whether their accountability programs' data collection is based upon short-term demands for information (reactive) or longer-term and anticipated information needs (proactive).[35]

- Most accountability systems contain no integration between elementary-secondary systems and higher education. Potential measurements include reports about how students from a specific high school perform in colleges or data concerning freshman grade point averages. Since many colleges and universities are developing new data systems, integration with secondary schools is technically possible and may be a potential goal for a statewide accountability system.

- Most states have at least two different testing programs--one for state assessment and another selected by the local school districts for its particular needs. Accountability options are difficult to blend, and policymakers will need to balance

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[33] Barton, Paul E. and Richard J. Coley. *Testing in America's Schools.* Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service (1994): p. 38.

[34] Mills, Stephen R. and Nanette E. Koelsch. *Accountability Programs and Projects in the Western Region.* Far West Laboratories, 1993. p. 34.

[35] Mills, Stephen R. and Nanette E. Koelsch. *Accountability Programs and Projects in the Western Region.* Far West Laboratories, 1993. p. 33.

local needs when determining the emphasis of the state's accountability system.[36] Policymakers also need to examine what the relative balance between state and local systems should be.[37] Some states, such as California, have been looking at an integrated system that allows school districts to choose from a generic set of items that are "anchored" to the statewide test.

- Even well-designed accountability techniques must be implemented through what is essentially a decentralized, loosely coupled administrative system that includes a complex structure of state and local school control. This structure makes it difficult to predict the impact of a specific accountability policy upon classroom practice and provides accountability opponents with potential roadblocks to hinder implementation.

- In almost all states, little data exists about middle schools. Not much is known, for example, about how tracks and courses in the middle grades determine academic choices in high schools. State accountability systems should attempt to review key indicators for such schools.

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY LAW IN NEVADA

In 1971, the Nevada Legislature appropriated $30,000 for an in-depth study of the status of the state's public school system. The Governor appointed a committee for this purpose and it issued a report in August 1972. The report made nine recommendations which were later incorporated into Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 15 of the 1973 Session. Three of those recommendations dealt with accountability:

- Identification and clarification of the significant and realistic educational goals and objectives;

- Accountability and wise use of educational resources; and

- Evaluation of teachers, supervisory staff, principals, and superintendents.

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[36] Kirst, Michael W. *Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers.* United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990: p. 30.

[37] Kirst, Michael W. *Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers.* United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990: p. 16.

Two other bills during the 1973 Session (A.B. 381 and A.B. 510) would have established accountability programs for elementary and secondary schools, along with the university system, respectively. All measures died in committee.[38]

Nevada Proficiency Examination

In 1977, the Legislature did adopt a mandated student testing program--the Nevada Proficiency Examination--to provide a statewide measure of student accountability that was not previously available. *Nevada Revised Statutes* 389.015 authorizes the program and specifies the content areas (mathematics, reading, and writing) and the grade levels to be examined. Until 1993, the districts were administered during the school year at grades 3, 6, 9, and 11. Beginning with the 1993-1994 school year, districts began testing grades 4, 8, and 11. To accomplish this requirement, Nevada's testing program consists of commercially manufactured norm-referenced tests and a state developed criterion referenced examination used in grades 9 and 11. The commercial tests are scored and reported through various arrangements in each district. The Nevada Proficiency Examination administered at grade 11 is scored and reported by the State Department of Education.

During its first 2 years (1978 through 1980), the testing program was decentralized. Districts selected their own tests which varied. To ensure that the program was consistent, the State Department of Education required in 1980 that all districts use the same tests. The following chart lists the tests administered for the proficiency program.

NEVADA PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION PROGRAM			
Grade	**Test Used**	**Type of Test**	**Content Area**
4	Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)	National norm-referenced	Reading, Writing, Mathematics
8	CTBS	National norm-referenced	Reading, Writing, Mathematics
8	Direct Writing Assessment	Criterion referenced	Writing
11	High School Proficiency Examinations	Criterion referenced for writing; norm-referenced for math and reading	Reading, Writing, Mathematics

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 1994.

[38] *Educational Accountability*. Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, Research Division, January 1975.

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Statewide testing is required for only three grades: 4th, 8th, and 11th. The CTBS (a norm-referenced test) is used for grades 4 and 8; the Nevada Proficiency Examination (a criterion or performance-based test) is given in grade 11. Appendix C list all tests administered by Nevada's school districts for the 1994-1995 school year.

Students who score poorly in grades 4 and 8 are offered remediation to help them pass the 11th grade proficiency examination. Students are required to pass the 11th grade proficiency test as a condition for graduation. The testing information was also used to target classroom instruction and to identify eligibility for Chapter 1 and other remedial education programs. According to a recent report by the State Department of Education, Nevada's school districts spend more than $1.34 million annually on testing and assessment activities. Approximately 27 percent of those expenditures (about $360,000), are in support of the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program.[39] In contrast, the Department reported in May 1988 that the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program (which then included grades 3, 6, 9, and 11), cost a total of $256,000 statewide (including staff salaries), using state, local and federal funds.[40]

Program of Accountability

During the 1987-1988 interim, the Legislative Study on Elementary and Secondary Education recommended that a comprehensive school accountability program be enacted. Under the original proposal, Nevada's schools were to be accredited through regulations established by the State Board of Education. The Department of Education was to collect and evaluate the results of its accreditation site visits and report its findings and recommendations to a permanent statutory legislative committee on education.

The original proposal attempted to link the two components of accountability--an indicator system and an accreditation system that would make use of its results. A number of amendments were made to the original version of this recommendation. Under the law finally enacted in 1989, each school district was required to adopt a program of accountability for the quality of the schools and educational achievement of pupils of the residents of the district. School boards were allowed to adopt the program of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NASC), or design their own program. None of the districts elected to accredit through the NASC--each chose to compile its own district-wide accountability report.[41]

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[39] Klein, Thomas W. *Survey of District Testing Practices, 1994-95.* Nevada Department of Education (December 14, 1994): p. 2.

[40] Nevada State Department of Education document titled "Student Testing: A Nevada Perspective, An Overview Presented to the S.C.R. 40 Legislative Subcommittee on Public Elementary and Secondary Education," May 12, 1988: p. 4.

[41] According to a memorandum dated January 4, 1990, from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Eugene Paslov, NASC accreditation requirements would have met only three of the eight requirements of Nevada's accountability statute; he also cited the potential "staggering" cost to the districts of acquiring accreditation.

The school accountability law, as it was finally adopted, required each school district to report to its residents concerning educational goals and objectives; comparisons between current and previous pupil achievement at each age and grade; pupil-to-teacher ratios for each grade; data concerning licensed and unlicensed personnel; a comparison of the types of classes each teacher is assigned to teach along with the teacher's licensure and qualifications; total expenditures per pupil from each individual funding source; the curriculum, including any special classes; attendance and advancement records in all grades and graduation rates in high school; and efforts made to increase the communication between parents and the district. Under the 1989 act, this information was reported for the school district as a whole, but not for individual schools.

Senate Bill 511 (1993 Session)

The 1993 Legislature enacted S.B. 511, making three basic changes to the 1989 accountability law:

- First, the bill shifted the reporting of information from the district level to the individual school building level.[42]

- Second, the measure provided the Superintendent of Public Instruction with the authority to specify uniform reporting requirements for accountability information among the school districts using common definitions and established methodologies.[43]

- Finally, S.B. 511 changed the method of reporting this information. The school districts are required to report the specified data, by school, to their citizens by March of each year. The districts also must submit a report by June 15 of each year to the State Superintendent identifying any problems involving the education program as identified by the accountability data. Proposed solutions to these problems are also to be reported by each district. The State Superintendent is required to analyze these reports and prepare a report to the Legislature concerning the effectiveness of these educational programs.[44]

At that time, some districts already had in place, or had planned, school-specific accountability systems which incorporated many of the S.B. 511 features--including an annual assessment to help address the needs of individual schools.[45]

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[42] NRS 385.347, Subsection 2.

[43] NRS 385.347, Subsection 3.

[44] NRS 385.347, Subsection 4.

[45] Minutes of the Nevada Legislature's Senate Committee on Finance, June 7, 1993, Exhibit J.

The 1994-1995 school year was the first period for the revised program. Each school district provided a report (containing 1992-1993 data) to its residents, for each school, using the definitions and format specified within the State Department of Education's *School Accountability Handbook*. In turn, the district-level reports were submitted to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The first report by the Superintendent concerning the statewide program was submitted to the 1995 Nevada Legislature, as required by the statute.[46] Achievement data, by district, may be found in Appendix D of this document. The report contains the data itself; an analysis of the data; a description of the impact of the program upon school districts and a discussion of possible changes to the program. A copy of the report's Executive Summary is included as Appendix E of this document.

Some school districts questioned the meaning of the requirement under NRS 385.347, subsection 4, concerning reports of deficiencies. One district interpreted the section to mean that the district was required to describe its effort to correct deficiencies in its program of accountability. A 1993 letter from Deputy Attorney General Melanie Crossley specified that the law referred to the identification and correction of the ". . . deficiencies in the quality of schools and the educational achievement of pupils at school sites based upon the analysis and interpretation of the data reported pursuant to this statute." Appendix F is a copy of the Deputy Attorney General's opinion.

Role of the State Department of Education

The State Department of Education (through the Superintendent of Public Instruction) has the authority to collect and report education data statewide.[47] The Department's Planning, Research, and Evaluation Branch conducts various research projects, administers the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program, and collects and analyzes the data for the accountability program. The unit also responds to the needs of the State Board of Education and the State Legislature for data concerning Nevada's system of public education.

As policymakers at all levels demand increasing amounts of data, the research and evaluation functions of the Department are becoming more and more important. Any revision or enhancement of the current program of accountability will have an effect upon the Department. Associated issues include increased funding to the agency for any additional requirements and a possible need to clarify and strengthen the authority of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in specifying and collecting required information from the school districts.

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[46] NRS 385.347, Subsection 5.

[47] NRS 251.040, Subsection 2; 385.200; and 385.347, Subsection 3.

CONCLUSION

As reformers continue to push for systemic changes, the role of assessment has taken on increased importance in the policy efforts to evaluate what does and does not work in education.

Although there are numerous technical objections to using student achievement data for accountability purposes, it is likely that policymakers will continue to demand this information. Due to concerns about uniform measurements and comparability, it is also likely that nationally norm-referenced tests will continue to be used in accountability systems.

As policymakers continue to use data to make decisions concerning public education, the demand for quality information will continue. The level of sophistication and policymaker reliance upon accountability systems will continue to increase. This trend requires that some assurances exist that the data collected is up to date and useable. States will continue to use achievement scores as a component of any accountability program. The need for reliable analyses of the information provided by such systems will become increasingly important.

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APPENDICES

Page

Appendix A
Accountability - Public Reporting of School Performance [Report Cards] . . 25

Appendix B
Two Approaches to Student Assessment Policy 29

Appendix C
Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts in 1994-1995 on a Districtwide Basis 33

Appendix D
Achievement Data 39

Appendix E
Executive Summary (State Department of Education's *School Accountability Handbook*) 45

Appendix F
Deputy Attorney General's Opinion dated November 15, 1993 49

Appendix A

Accountability - Public Reporting of School Performance [Report Cards]

Clearinghouse notes . . . . . ACCOUNTABILITY

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427

303-299-3600
FAX 303-296-8332

ACCOUNTABILITY — PUBLIC REPORTING OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE (REPORT CARDS)
February 1995

State	Current Level of Comprehensiveness	State	Current Level of Comprehensiveness
Alabama	3	Nebraska	1
Alaska	2	Nevada	3
Arizona	2	New Hampshire	1
Arkansas	3	New Jersey	2
California	3	New Mexico	2
Colorado	2	New York	2
Connecticut	3	North Carolina	2
Delaware	3	North Dakota	1
Florida	2	Ohio	3
Georgia	2	Oklahoma	1
Hawaii	2	Oregon	3
Idaho	2	Pennsylvania	1
Illinois	3	Rhode Island	1
Indiana	3	South Carolina	1
Iowa	2	South Dakota	2
Kansas	1	Tennessee	3
Kentucky	3	Texas	3
Louisiana	2	Utah	2
Maine	3	Virginia	2
Maryland	2	Washington	1
Massachusetts	3	West Virginia	3
Michigan	1	Wisconsin	2
Mississippi	2	Wyoming	1
Missouri	1		
Montana	1		

Level 1 is the least comprehensive. For example, a state at this level may require only information on student test scores and dropout rates for a district.

Level 2 is more inclusive. For example, a state at this level may require the gathering and reporting of information on student achievement, dropout rates, teacher/pupil ratios and educational attainment level of the teaching force.

Level 3 is the most comprehensive. For example, a state at this level of public reporting may release student performance information on teacher competency, supply and out-of-field assignment; estimated expenditures per student; efforts to improve dropout or performance rates; and information on the instructional program. Comparisons, building-to-building or district-to-district, are generally possible.

Compiled by Kathy Christie, ECS Information Clearinghouse

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Appendix B

Two Approaches to Student Assessment Policy

TABLE 1

Two Approaches to Student Assessment Policy

	Motivators	Key Actors	Underlying Assumptions
Persuasion	Information Beliefs and values	Action may be initiated by different groups, which include parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public	Test results and beliefs about why achievement should be improved will prompt action. Educators will respond positively, because they interpret test information in the same way and share similar values. The actions taken may be diffuse and vary across sites, or more uniform action (e.g., a common curriculum) may be urged. Student achievement will improve, although the process may be slow and indirect.
Regulation	Rules allocating rewards and sanctions	Although other groups may be involved in initiation and implementation, policymakers are the lead actors	Schools should be accountable to the public, and rewards and sanctions are a mechanism for ensuring greater accountability. Improved student achievement is a critical component of accountability. Assessments can measure achievement consistent with public expectations, provide a guide for how teaching should change, and serve as the basis for distributing rewards and sanctions. Material incentives will motivate educators to change their teaching to be consistent with the assessment. Greater accountability will lead to changed teaching and, hence, to improved student achievement.

Appendix C

Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts in 1994-1995 on a Districtwide Basis

33

Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts in 1994-95
On a Districtwide Basis

Prepared by
Thomas W. Klein, Ph.D., Coordinator
Nevada Proficiency Examination Program
December 7, 1994

District	Test	Grades	Admin. Time (min.)	% of Students	Purpose(s)
All Districts Administer These Nevada Proficiency Examination Program Tests	HSPE in Reading[N], Math[N], and Writing[C],	11 12 and Adult	175	100% as needed	High School Proficiency Examination
	CTBS/4[N]	4 and 8	96	100%	Nevada Proficiency Examination
	NPEP Writing[C]	8	75	100%	Nevada Proficiency Examination
	LAS[C]	4 and 8	Varies		Alternative to CTBS/4 for Limited English Proficient Students
Carson City	CTBS/4[N]	3 and 5	3: 300 5: 316	100%	Diagnosis, Chapter I, and Accountability
	Performance Assessment[C]	3 and 5		100%	Assessment of Achievement of Content/Skill Standards in the 3rd and 5th Grade Carson City Courses of Study
Churchill	CTBS/4[N]	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9	2,3: 165 5-9: 151	100%	Assess Proficiency in Reading, Math, Science and Social Studies
Clark	CTBS/4[N]	6 and 11	106	100%	Survey of Basic Skills to Assess Academic Proficiency
	CBAP[C] Writing Reading Math	 2 through 5 1 through 5 1 through 5	 60 60 60	100%	Curriculum-Based Assessment Program in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
	TCS[N]	6 and 11	54	100%	Test of Cognitive Ability

[N] Norm-Referenced Test [C] Criterion-Referenced Test

Test Identification: ACT - American College Testing Program ASVAB - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery CELF - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals CAT - California Achievement Test CTBS/4 - Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills ESS - Early School Success Screening GATES - Gates-McGinitie Reading Test LAS - Language Assessment Scales PSAT - Pre Scholastic Aptitude Test SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test SABE - Spanish Assessment of Basic Education TCS - Test of Cognitive Skills TOTAL2 - Test of Adolescent Language

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Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts 1994-95 (Cont.)

Clark (Continued)	LAS[N]	2 through 12	60	7%	LEP English Language Proficiency
Douglas	ESS (Lang. Skills Only)	K	240	80%	K Screening for Essential Skills
	CELF[N]	K	30	100%	K Placement - Chapter I
	Pre-LAS[N]	K and 1 through 3	300	Spanish Speakers	LEP Screening
	LAS[N]	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12	300	Spanish Speakers	LEP Screening
	GATES[N]	2 through 6	20	95%	Reading Diagnosis and Progress
	SABE	1 through 8	226	non-English Speakers	Curriculum Placement
	Math-CRT[C]	1 through 9	80	98%	Assess Student Mastery
	Lang. Arts Benchmarks	1 through 6 3 exams yearly	240	100%	Assess student history in Reading and Language Arts
	Lang. Arts Portfolio Assessment	Grades 1-5 Grade 6 (95-96)	30	100%	Assess student growth in written communication, attitudes, and self-perception
	Analytic Writing	Grades 4-6	75	98%	Assess growth in writing traits
	TOTAL2	grades 7, 8, and 9		5%	Chapter I placement
Elko	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10		100%	Diagnosis, Chapter I and Accountability
	LAS[C]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10		10%	Identification of Limited English Proficient Students
Esmeralda	CTBS/4[N]	2, 3, 5, 6, and 7	2,3: 281 5-7: 316	100%	Assess Student Proficiency
Eureka	CTBS/4[N]	2 and 6	2: 262 6: 316	100%	Guide Instruction and Accountability

[N] Norm-Referenced Test [C] Criterion-Referenced Test

Test Identification: ACT - American College Testing Program ASVAB - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery CELF - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals CAT - California Achievement Test CTBS/4 - Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills ESS - Early School Success Screening GATES - Gates-McGinitie Reading Test LAS - Language Assessment Scales PSAT - Pre Scholastic Aptitude Test SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test SABE - Spanish Assessment of Basic Education TCS - Test of Cognitive Skills TOTAL2 - Test of Adolescent Language

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Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts 1994-95 (Cont.)

Humboldt	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7	1-3: 265 5-7: 316	100%	Measure Academic Proficiency and Accountability
Lander	CTBS/4[N]	2, 3, 5, 6, and 7		100%	Diagnostic
	ACT	11 and 12		60%	College Aptitude
	SAT	11		20%	College Aptitude
	ASVAB	11 and 12		50%	Armed Forces Aptitude
Lincoln	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9	1-3: 265 5-9: 316	100%	Assess Student Proficiency
Lyon	CTBS/4[N]	2 and 6	2: 262 6: 316	100%	Guide Instruction and Chapter I
	Math CRT	1 through 4			In Development
Mineral	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7	1-3: 160 5-7: 151	100%	Guide Instruction and Accountability
Nye	CTBS/4[N]	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10		100%	Assess Student Proficiency
	LAS[C]	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10		10%	Identification of Limited English Proficient
Pershing	CTBS/4[N]	2, 3, 5, 6, and 7	2,3: 281 5-7: 316	100%	Evaluation
	LAS[C]	2, 3, 5, 6, and 7		5%	Alternative to CTBS/4 for LEP Students
	ASVAB	11 and 12		35%	Armed Forces Aptitude
Storey	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10	1-3: 265 5-10: 316	100%	District Data
Washoe	CTBS/4[N]	3, 5, 6, and 7	3: 300 5-7: 316	100%	Achievement, Guide Instruction and Accountability
	CRTs[C]	K, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8	120	100%	Guide Instruction
	Writing[C]	6	60	100%	Guide Instruction
	Foreign Language	8 and 9	60	25%	Assess Student Proficiency

[N] Norm-Referenced Test [C] Criterion-Referenced Test

Test Identification: ACT - American College Testing Program ASVAB - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery CELF - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals CAT - California Achievement Test CTBS/4 - Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills ESS - Early School Success Screening GATES - Gates-McGinitie Reading Test LAS - Language Assessment Scales PSAT - Pre Scholastic Aptitude Test SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test SABE - Spanish Assessment of Basic Education TCS - Test of Cognitive Skills TOTAL2 - Test of Adolescent Language

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Tests Administered by Nevada's School Districts 1994-95 (Cont.)

Washoe (Continued)	Algebra Prognosis	7	60	100%	Guide Instruction
	PSAT[N], SAT[N], and ACT[N]	11 and 12		50%	College Entrance
	Reading Diagnostic	2 through 9	60	50%	Remedial Instruction Diagnosis
	LAS[C]	3, 5, 6, and 7	140	All LEP	Screening LEP Students for CTBS/4 Eligibility
	Credit by Examination	9 through 12		5%	Alternative High School Credits
	Writing Folder (Portfolios)	K through 6	30	100%	Monitor Progress and Guide Instruction
	Vocational Interest and Aptitude	7 through 12		50%	Career Planning
White Pine	CTBS/4[N]	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7	1-3: 265 5-7: 316	100%	Assess Student Proficiency

Vendors of Commercial Tests Used by Districts:

Test	Vendor	Test	Vendor
CTBS/4	CTB/McGraw Hill	CELF (Douglas)	Psychological Corporation
LAS and Pre-LAS	CTB/McGraw Hill	GATES (Douglas)	Gates/McGinity
SABE	CTB/McGraw Hill	CRT Item Bank (Lyon)	National Computer Systems
TCS	CTB/McGraw Hill	Reading Diagnostic (Washoe)	PsyCorp and Riverside
		Algebra Prognosis (Washoe)	Psychological Corporation

[N] Norm-Referenced Test [C] Criterion-Referenced Test

Test Identification: ACT - American College Testing Program ASVAB - Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery CELF - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals CAT - California Achievement Test CTBS/4 - Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills ESS - Early School Success Screening GATES - Gates-McGinitie Reading Test LAS - Language Assessment Scales PSAT - Pre Scholastic Aptitude Test SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test SABE - Spanish Assessment of Basic Education TCS - Test of Cognitive Skills TOTAL2 - Test of Adolescent Language

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Appendix D

Achievement Data

3RD GRADE COMPREHENSIVE TEST OF BASIC SKILLS (CTBS)/4 AVERAGE PERCENTILE RANKS FOR NEVADA BY COUNTY 1992-1993 SCHOOL YEAR			
School District	**Reading**	**Math**	**Language**
NATIONAL	**50**	**50**	**50**
Carson City	44	39	38
Churchill	62	49	50
Clark	57	61	54
Douglas	63	66	63
Elko	57	53	53
Esmeralda	43	58	47
Eureka	66	61	54
Humboldt	59	59	57
Lander	61	59	58
Lincoln	57	62	50
Lyon	54	49	48
Mineral	51	37	28
Nye	41	45	41
Pershing	52	37	45
Storey	64	66	64
Washoe	58	61	58
White Pine	64	49	59

Note: **The national average (norm) percentage score for each category is 50.**
Source: **1994 School District Accountability Reports (NRS 385.347).**

Prepared by the Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, Revised February 1995.

BP- 95-14

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6TH GRADE COMPREHENSIVE TEST OF BASIC SKILLS (CTBS)/4 AVERAGE PERCENTILE RANKS FOR NEVADA BY COUNTY 1992-1993 SCHOOL YEAR			
School District	**Reading**	**Math**	**Language**
NATIONAL	**50**	**50**	**50**
Carson City	48	45	49
Churchill	61	55	58
Clark	53	63	54
Douglas	60	69	61
Elko	58	53	56
Esmeralda	43	50	43
Eureka	46	71	61
Humboldt	47	45	46
Lander	54	70	63
Lincoln	54	51	53
Lyon	51	49	50
Mineral	39	36	42
Nye	42	41	47
Pershing	41	48	43
Storey	61	56	49
Washoe	59	63	60
White Pine	62	48	55

Note: **The national average (norm) percentage score for each category is 50.**
Source: **1994 School District Accountability Reports (NRS 385.347).**

Prepared by the Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, Revised February 1995.

BP-95-14

NEVADA HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PASSING BY END OF GRADE 12 1992-1993 SCHOOL YEAR			
School District	**Math**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Carson City	100	100	100
Churchill	97.9	98.4	98.4
Clark	96.5	96.0	97.2
Douglas	98.6	99.3	99.6
Elko	97.0	97.5	98.2
Esmeralda	No High School		
Eureka	100	100	100
Humboldt	99.3	98.0	100
Lander	100	100	100
Lincoln	100	100	100
Lyon	93.9	94.3	98.3
Mineral	93.0	92.0	97.0
Nye	100	100	100
Pershing	100	100	100
Storey	100	100	100
Washoe	98.0	97.0	99.0
White Pine	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Source: 1994 School District Accountability Reports (NRS 385.347).

Prepared by the Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, Revised February 1995

BP-95-14

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION SCORES BY SCHOOL DISTRICT WITH NEVADA AND NATIONAL AVERAGES 1992-1993 SCHOOL YEAR

School District	Percent Taking Test	ACT	Percent Taking Test	SAT Verbal	SAT Math
NATIONAL	N.A.	20.7	N.A.	424	478
NEVADA	N.A.	21.0	N.A.	432	488
Carson City	51	21.0	46	416	472
Churchill	53	21.6	24	431	478
Clark	43	21.1	27	430	495
Douglas	49*	21.8	33*	449	505
Elko	40	21.7	14	517	450
Esmeralda	No High School				
Eureka	63	21.9	69	435	392
Humboldt	55	20.6	28	428	468
Lander	54	20.0	20	270	310
Lincoln	60	21.1	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Lyon	19	21.5	43	459	496
Mineral	32*	18.7*	12*	376*	381*
Nye	41	19.0	12	414	435
Pershing	81	19.1	22	471	521
Storey	37	18.5	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Washoe	35	21.3	26	444	491
White Pine	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Sources: **1994 School District Accountability Reports (NRS 385.347); *Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT): Nevada Statewide Results, 1993*, Nevada State Department of Education, 1993.**

*** Not reported in accountability report - obtained from other sources.**

Prepared by the Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, Revised February 1995.

BP-95-14

Appendix E

David L. Smith
Analysis of Nevada School Accountability System
(Based on NRS 385.347)
Submitted to Nevada State Legislature.
Nevada Department of Education, February 1995.

Executive Summary

During the 1993 session, the Nevada State Legislature enacted into law Nevada Revised Statute 385.347, commonly known as the Nevada School Accountability Law. It requires all school districts in Nevada to inform the public on the performance of public schools throughout the state. School accountability was accomplished through a system of reports described in the present analysis. Individual school reports were provided to parents and made available to others. School district reports provided information about each school in the district to media sources and other interested groups or individuals.

Handbooks to guide the development of accountability reports were generated by the Nevada Department of Education after meetings with a broad range of statewide educational, legislative, parental, news media, and private representatives. The handbooks specified data elements to appear in the reports based upon the information required by the law and the input of these various groups. These data elements are reviewed in the present report.

Comprehensive accountability reports for 332 schools and all 17 school districts for the 1992-93 school year were provided by the school districts in a timely fashion. *The quality of the reports from each district was regarded as high, and the bulk of the data requested in the handbook appeared in the reports generated by each district* (see *Table 1*). A school-by-school summary of various data elements appears in *Appendix C* of this report. In the absence of state funding for school accountability, school districts expended considerable effort and expense in generating the reports. Estimates of the impact of producing reports for the 1993-94 school year are listed in *Table 2*.

Statistical analyses reported here investigated relationships between various school characteristics and statewide testing of student achievement. It should be noted that many of the findings that could be uncovered in analyzing individual student data may be obscured since the present analyses compare information aggregated at the school-level. Although further analyses are recommended in later accountability reports, the present school-level analyses suggest the particular effectiveness of:

- in-school programs and school-readiness preschool programs that target low socioeconomic children and children with English as a second language;
- programs to improve student attendance rates;
- programs to encourage parental attendance at school conferences and involvement in their children's education;

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- programs to encourage teachers to continue their own academic achievement; and

- programs that encourage student involvement in gifted/talented and advance placement programs.

Since the accountability program was in its pilot year, it is not possible at this time to ascertain how school districts and the State Department will make use of the information collected to improve the performance of various schools. Each school district provided the State Department with an evaluative report on the impact of the accountability program (see *Appendix B*), but these reports were generated only shortly after the school reports were generated, so school district follow-up is difficult to determine. Review of the districts' future effectiveness reports should provide more information regarding district efforts to follow-up the accountability findings. Also, the impact of the accountability information in guiding State Department efforts at school improvement should be considered in future analyses.

In continuing the school accountability process, legislative support for the following will be critical in assuring the usefulness of the mandate:

- providing funds for the Nevada Department of Education to develop a computerized system for standardizing school districts' calculation of information and generating school reports;

- providing funds to school districts to offset the financial impact of providing such reports to the public; and

- reducing the sheer amount of required information.

With regard to the last recommendation, particularly problematic is the listing of student achievement results from various measures at each grade. Reporting multiple student test results at each grade provides parents with a voluminous, and perhaps overwhelming amount of information. Required student achievement reporting should be restricted to only those grades and subjects contained in the statewide student assessment program. Likewise, student advancement at most schools is fairly consistent in grades beyond first grade and may not need to be reported for all grades.

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Appendix F

Deputy Attorney General's Opinion dated November 15, 1993

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BROOKE A. NIELSEN
Assistant Attorney General

November 15, 1993

Eugene T. Paslov, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Department of Education
400 West King Street
Carson City, Nevada 89710

Dear Dr. Paslov:

You have asked this office for an opinion regarding NRS 385.347, as amended by Act of June 1, 1993, ch. 644, § 1, 1992 Nev. Stat. 2745 ("Senate Bill 511"). A difference of opinion was raised in a discussion between your office and local school district superintendents. One school district has interpreted this section to mean that the district must describe efforts to correct deficiencies in its system of accountability, not efforts to correct deficiencies that have been identified at the school sites. The interpretation will affect the type of information included in the report to the legislature and will impact local school districts' planning for compliance with the reporting requirement.

QUESTION

Is it the meaning of NRS 385.347(4) that each district shall identify deficiencies and describe efforts to correct deficiencies:

1) In the system of accountability reporting; or

2) At the school sites, based upon an analysis and interpretation of the data reported under this statute?

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ANALYSIS

NRS 385.347, sometimes known as the school accountability law, was first adopted by our legislature in 1989. Each of the 17 school districts reported district-wide data or information to the parents and community it served and to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction pursuant to the law. In the 1993 session of the legislature, the law was amended to provide refinements and to specify that the data or information shall be reported for each school in the district rather than for the district as a whole.

Subsection (4) of NRS 385.347, as amended by Senate Bill 511, provides that:

> 4. On or before April 15 of each year, the board of trustees of each school district shall submit to the state board the report made pursuant to subsection 2. On or before June 15 of each year, the board of trustees of each school district shall submit to the state board:
>
> (a) A separate report summarizing the effectiveness of the district's program of accountability during the school year; and
>
> (b) A description of the efforts the district has made to correct deficiencies identified in the report submitted pursuant to paragraph (a). [Emphasis added.]

If the language of the statute is plain and unambiguous, there is no room for construction. *Atlantic Commercial Dev. Corp. v. Boyles*, 103 Nev. 35, 38, 732 P.2d 1360 (1987). An examination of the language of the law begins with subsection (4)(a) which calls for a report of the effectiveness of the school district's "program of accountability." The key to our analysis is the description of "program of accountability" found in subsection 1 of NRS 385.347, as amended by Senate Bill 511. It states that the board of trustees shall "adopt a program providing for the accountability of the school district . . . for the quality of the schools and the educational achievement of the pupils in the district." *Id.* From the description we glean that the program of accountability is not merely the methodology for gathering and reporting the data. The deficiencies identified in the report will be deficiencies in the "quality of the schools and the educational achievement of the pupils in the district." *Id.* The effectiveness of the program would be how it affects the quality of the schools and the educational achievement of the pupils. In addition, whether the information or data constitutes a deficiency is a determination to be made by the local trustees from the data or information gathered pursuant to the law.

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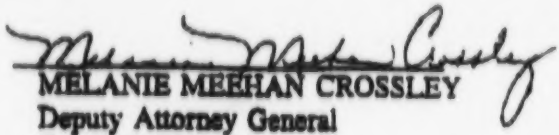
CONCLUSION

NRS 385.347, as amended by Senate Bill 511, requires that each school district identify deficiencies and describe efforts to correct deficiencies in the quality of schools and the educational achievement of pupils at school sites based upon the analysis and interpretation of the data reported pursuant to this statute.

Cordially,

FRANKIE SUE DEL PAPA
Attorney General

By: 
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